

REVELATION, PART 4

Acts 10.34-48

If we think of this story about Peter and Cornelius only in terms of the conversion of Cornelius and his relations, then we miss the largest part of the story.

It is certain from this story that the life of Cornelius and those he had invited were changed dramatically. But that is to be expected, because the Bible says in...

2 Cor. 5:17 *...that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (NLT)*

But there are other changes brought about by this planned encounter between Israel and the heathen, unclean nations of the world that we miss when we only see the visible results.

The first of these is the change that came about in Peter's life.

His eyes and heart had been opened to a new panorama of missions. Now he saw, not just the need to reach the nation before him – a formidable task in itself – but the entire world now lay open as a field of harvest.

We must continue to remind ourselves that Peter did not have the benefit of perspective that we have. Although this event was momentous and clearly understood by Peter to be so, it is only with the view of history that we can see how important it was in world events.

Remember that Peter's world extended not much farther than the regions around the Mediterranean Sea and to the borders of Persia. He may have had some awareness of Europe and of Asia, but it is certain that he knew nothing about the Western Hemisphere.

But God knew all about it. He knew that this single act of obedience on the part of His disciple, Peter, would open the flood of an artesian well – a fountain of evangelism and missions that

would continue to flow until every people group has heard the message of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Not only did this event bring about a dramatic change in the lives of Cornelius and friends and in the life of Peter, but we must always remember the overarching will of God to accomplish His plan of creating sons who will worship Him for eternity.

Heb. 2:10 *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (ESV)*

Since the creation God has been about the business of creating sons who would worship Him and give Him glory throughout eternity. This story of Cornelius is the gateway by which this message was made available to every people group from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Someone else said that Peter and the church were “playing catch-up,” because God had already been at work in the hearts of Cornelius and friends even before Peter began to speak.

But again, the story is about so much more than just a salvation event.

By coming to earth in the form of man – by His death, burial, and resurrection – Jesus not only reconciled the broken relationship between God and man caused by Adam's sin and rebellion in the Garden of Eden – he also restored the balance of the universe that had been set in disarray by the rebellion of Lucifer before the earth was ever created.

Eph. 1:9 *(By way of the plan of redemption, God made) known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (ESV)*

Col. 1:19 *God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him (in Jesus), 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things,*

whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (NKJV)

The story of the Bible is the story of God working out His perfect plan through the creation and through the plan of redemption which reconciles not only sinful man, but also all things in heaven. It is a picture we must keep in mind as we continue to study the story of Peter and Cornelius and the remainder of the book of Acts.

With that broad perspective in mind, let us now come back to the present moment in the story of Peter and Cornelius.

If there was a song that might have come to Peter's lips after all that had transpired over the last four days of this story about his encounter with Cornelius, it might have been "I Can See Clearly Now."

Peter had been blinded by tradition that had evolved into doctrine, God performed a miracle of spiritual healing to cure Peter's double vision – to enable Peter to see that what looked like two similar but separate objects were, in fact, one.

Peter came to understand that, when it comes to the question of a relationship with God, there is no difference in the Jew and the non-Jew – both needed a touch from God's almighty hand.

Peter had been so focused on what he believed to be the truth that he failed to see that the Jewish nation was never meant to be an end in itself, but that God had intended them to be a means to achieving His own goals for creation.

It may be right about here in the story that Peter began to recall some of those memory verses from Sunday School.

Hosea 2:23 I will say to those who were not My people, "You are My people!" And they will say, "You are my God!"

Amos 9.11-12 quoted by James in *Acts 15* in confirmation of the conversion of the Gentiles in verse **16** *After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I*

will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.

Micah 4:2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths."

Zech. 2:11 And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people...

God had always intended for all nations to be part of His kingdom, and Israel was His instrument for making that fact known to the nations. You wonder, in light of all the scriptural evidence for this truth, how the Jewish scholars and scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees could have missed it.

The same is true of the Gospel message. *God is no respecter of persons.*

He does not receive a person or give them access to His grace based on external circumstances or birth or economic, political, or racial standing. And He does not reject men on this basis.

1 Sam. 16:7 ...the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Thus men of all nations are called into the kingdom – all men who fear God and are obedient to His righteous call. (*Verse 35*)

At least in the western world, we have carried the point of rugged individualism – "a belief in the importance of the individual and the virtue of self-reliance and personal independence" – to the point that we have applied it to beliefs and doctrines so that to criticize a person philosophically is equivalent to attacking them physically.

Our culture simply won't tolerate such behavior. Thus we have the cultural doctrines of multiculturalism, tolerance, and hate crimes.

The mantra of contemporary man goes something like this: “All men are created equal, therefore, it does not matter what one believes. You cannot criticize or condemn them for it without violating their right to exist.”

Peter agreed with the first sentiment – all men are created equal – in **verse 34** – “God is no respecter of persons.”

Col. 3:11 ...here is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Gal. 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

But in **Verse 35**, Peter clarifies the message by pointing out that God **does** regard what men believe in their hearts as a clearly distinguishing factor in His relationship with them.

1 Cor. 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

Here is the lesson Peter had learned and which he shared with the friends and family of Cornelius: God does not look on the outward appearance – at personalities, wealth, or works. He looks only on the heart which can find no healing apart from the good news of the gospel

So Peter summarizes the gospel message as simply as it had ever been stated up until this time.

In **Verses 36-37**, Peter continued his message by telling his listeners that this word – this truth about the way God loves and the people God loves – came by way of the Jews but has now been revealed to the world through the preaching of the name of Jesus Christ.

This word – this message, the gospel, the good news – that has spread through all of Judea had its beginning in Galilee.

Following His baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus, a man of Nazareth – anointed by God with the Holy Ghost – immediately began His ministry of doing good and of healing those under the oppression of Satan.

All of His works testified to the fact that God was with Him and in Him carrying out the plan of redemption.

In **verse 39**, Peter affirms that he, along with many others, personally witnessed His works and ways. They saw Him crucified, yet in **verses 40-41**, he affirmed that they also could testify to the fact that God raised Him upon the third day.

He appeared to many witnesses – not to everyone, but to those chosen by God – those who were privileged to eat and drink with Jesus after His resurrection.

How significant that Peter’s message never changed. It always centered on the resurrection – not just any resurrection such as that of Jairus’ daughter or the more recent event in Peter’s own ministry where he was instrumental in bringing Dorcas back from the grave – but the only resurrection with the power to convert the human soul – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection is the centerpiece of Peter’s sermon, preceded by the words and works that led up to it (**verses 36-39**) and followed by the mission and the message that flowed from it (**verses 42-43**).

In **verse 42**, Peter relates that after His resurrection, Jesus gave the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations and to testify that He was ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead.

Some commentators interpret this reference to “the living and the dead” in light of the rapture when Jesus will call the dead in Christ from the grave and then those that are living will be called up to meet them and Jesus in the air.

But I believe that a better interpretation of “the living and the dead” is that “the living” makes reference to those who are alive

in Christ by the acknowledgement of His lordship and “the dead” refers to those who remain dead in their trespasses and sins having never experienced the saving grace of God. All will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

In *verse 43*, Peter reminded his listeners that this Jesus is the same One spoken by the prophets who said that through His authority “*whosoever believeth in Him*” – and that included those who were listening to Peter that day – “*would receive remission of sins.*”

And now, at the sound of these words, expressing this greatest of all truths concerning salvation, the people could constrain themselves no longer, but responded to the call of the Holy Ghost – interrupting Peter’s sermon at its climax and proving once and for all that “*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” (*Romans 10.13*)

There was no prayer, no laying on of hands – just a sudden filling with the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues and praising God – the identical phenomenon witnessed by the disciples at Pentecost.

Some people are confused today by the speaking in tongues, as if this event set a precedent for how the Holy Spirit evidences himself in the believer. But this experience at the home of Cornelius is an inaugural event of the church.

This is the age of miracles when God confirmed His will and His purpose to make the gospel message available to all nations – to all people groups to the ends of the earth.

This event is no more a precedent than is Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. It is how God confirmed that salvation is within His domain and it is by His authority that men experience His grace unto salvation.

The Jewish contingency who came with Peter were astonished to see the Holy Ghost come upon these people who, just moments before had been classified in their theology and custom as pagan and unclean.

There may have been questions from the men directed at Peter – or at least looks of doubt along with the astonishment – so Peter immediately proposed in *verse 47*...

God is perfect in carrying out His purposes, even when entrusted to the imperfect will of men.

Had Peter been allowed to finish his sermon as he did at Pentecost, he would most likely have asked for the people to respond to his message and then have proposed baptism for those who professed belief in Christ.

Had this been the sequence of events then those who were traveling with Peter may have had grounds for protest later when the issue was dealt with by the counsel of apostles in Jerusalem.

But God intervened. How could anyone object to baptism by water when it was so clearly demonstrated that Christ had baptized them in the Holy Spirit?

Furthermore, Peter apparently did not do the baptism, but commanded these new believers be immersed in the name of the Lord – indicating that this responsibility fell to those who traveled with Peter and who had witnessed all that had transpired.

It would be difficult for any of the six Jewish men with Peter to protest what happened if they themselves were physically involved in carrying it out.

So all were baptized into the fellowship of the church as God continued to do what He had begun at Pentecost with the Jews, repeated in Samaria with those distantly related to the Jews, and now, for the third time, on those who had no relation to the Jews other than their fallen nature and their need for redemption.

God is at work toward and in and through His people inviting men of all nations to come to the cross for the forgiveness of sins and to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ that they might experience the kind of life that only God is willing to give by His grace – eternal life.